



World Chronicle

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EARTH SUMMIT

The United Nations Environment Programme, UNEP, has defined its mission as "providing leadership and encouraging partnerships in caring for the environment by inspiring, informing and enabling nations and people to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations". But how successful has the mission been carried out? Klaus Töpfer, Executive Director of UNEP, discusses the efforts to balance the need for development with our desire for a green planet.

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ANNOUNCER: From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **World Chronicle**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues.

Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns, and this is **World Chronicle**.

Six years ago, the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, provided a platform for ongoing global efforts to preserve our environment. How successful have we been in our efforts to balance the need for development with our desire to have a clean and green planet? Located in Nairobi, Kenya, the United Nations Environment Programme, UNEP, provides leadership and encourages partnerships in caring for the environment and played a central role in the Earth Summit.

Our guest today is Under-Secretary-General Klaus Töpfer, Executive Director of UNEP. Mr. Töpfer is also Executive Director of the UN Centre for Human Settlements, HABITAT. Joining me to talk with Mr. Töpfer is Judy Lessing of *Radio New Zealand* and Jack Freeman of the *Earth Times*.

Mr. Töpfer, welcome to **World Chronicle**.

Mr. Töpfer could you tell us how successful you think UNEP has been in dealing with these problems that we have just been speaking about trying to produce cleaner, greener planet since the Earth Summit? Has it achieved the goals that were established by the Earth Summit?

TÖPFER: First of all, thank you very much for inviting me. It's a wonderful possibility to discuss with outstanding journalists this very important topic. Second, I have to underline again and again that Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit 1992 was not at all an environment event. It was an event of sustainable development and I think it was very important to underline it.

LITTLEJOHNS: But related to the environment.

TÖPFER: Yes, of course.

LITTLEJOHNS: You see otherwise how do we call it the Earth Summit if it was...

TÖPFER: Yes, the Earth Summit was very good topic to discuss this in the very

beginning. In those days, I was Environment Minister of my country going around the world and you came to the southern part, the developing countries, they never mentioned that this was a United Nations conference on environment and development. In those parts of the world, it was a United Nations conference on development and environment because the most important topic in those parts of the world, is the increase of population. There is a huge poverty problem but how can they overcome poverty and by the way poverty is, until today, the most toxic substance also in the world for the environment. If you cannot overcome poverty, it is very difficult to have also the environment topic solved and therefore, by the way, it is a wonderful possibility to have the headquarter of this programme in Nairobi, in Kenya, in the developing world. We can go downtown to Nairobi and see there is a problem for the people having no drinking water, having no access to waste handling, sewage water and all these. So again Rio was the possibility to link economic progress and environment precautionary aspect and social equity. These are the three pillars of sustainable development and the question: Did we really run up to the expectation of Rio. I cannot say yes. No. It was not, until now, possible to clearly fulfill the expectation especially in the developing world but also with regard to the consumption and production pattern in the developed world. We have, if you have the wonderful Report of the United Nations Development Programme of our colleague, Gus Speth, on the table now with the Human Development Report, you see the consumption pattern which was a huge difference between the industrialized pattern of one world having a lot of energy, having a lot of resources for themselves and bringing some of the costs of their welfare to the developing countries. These are the topic we cannot finally solve so we have a lot to do before us and I sincerely hope that this is also the overall conviction because right now we have the economic crisis in the world. Everybody is interested in overcoming this very, very difficult problem and it cannot be solved by bringing the costs of these to the environment again who wants to subsidize economic progress by bringing costs to the environment will make a very bad economic policy.

LITTLEJOHNS: So is the economic crisis going to infringe badly on efforts to protect the environment?

TÖPFER: That's absolutely right. We learned in quite a lot of countries – Southeast Asia, for example – that if for one day, or for one week to the other lots of people, millions, are below the poverty line it is a huge, huge and tremendous additional problem for the environment. If you don't know how to feed your family the next day and then you are asked the next day to please don't touch the woods, don't go to the forest, it is very difficult to convince people. I was just in Bangkok, in Thailand, where the United Nations Environment Programme, environment on a global level has their office for Southeast Asia, for the Pacific, and they discussed with the Ministers there. They have a part in their natural reserve where they produced, until now, shrimps and they decided to phase out this before the economic crisis because there were alternative for the people to go to work. And now you ask me, if you are in my situation, those people will be without any job. Do you really want to phase it out? I think we must have this link very clearly also with regard to the global economic problems to bring them in the context of the environment. They are not of win/win situations where they have better economic development link this very good environment solution, we must stimulate technology but also we must change our behaviour.

LITTLEJOHNS: So is the environment taking second place to sustainable development?

TÖPFER: To some extent. There is really the danger that in those days when unemployment, financial crisis is really challenging the people, they are not quite aware of their responsibility for the environment and therefore we must be the advocate. We must always be underlining: "if you do this, if you subsidize your economic progress via the environment you will be very soon in a situation that you cannot reach the economic goal and destroy the environment just the same."

LESSING: But does that mean that it would, as the UN is doing in so many areas, be vital to bring in the sorts of manufacturers, industries, which can indeed hurt the environment if they are not doing things properly but can be persuaded that it's a win situation for them if they can do it right and they will provide jobs? I mean is it very important to involve the business community and industry?

TÖPFER: I am absolutely convinced that it is vital. You know we are under globalization. Globalization is mainly the pillar of the globalization of the economy, of the market economy, so if we cannot join our efforts, also these private business it would be very difficult to succeed. It is not the only pillar, I have to underline. We rely also on legally binding instruments like conventions. Conventions for the problem of climate change. We need legally binding instruments for the different nations to decrease the CO₂ emission. We need those, luckily got those instruments for bio-diversity, for the creation of desertification, for the question of to ban the export of hazardous waste and others. So cooperation, yes, but also legally binding instruments to come to the clear solution of those global problems.

FREEMAN: We started with the Earth Summit and the premise of the Earth Summit was that the rich countries should help the poor countries develop so they would not pollute as they develop the way the rich countries had. We had some successes in Rio in environment with the conventions you just mentioned but there really has not been much progress in eliminating poverty which is the worst polluter. What can be done about that?

TÖPFER: I can't agree more. First of all, the problem of cooperation to overcome poverty is not at all sufficient. The question of the Official Development Aid, ODA, was raised in Rio. We discussed it more than one night. It was the main aim of the developing countries and I think they were right to come to this 0.7 percent of official development aid linked to the GNP. Until now that is not reached. Quite the contrary. The problem is even going down with some wonderful exceptions, no doubt. So there is a need. Of course, on the other side, we have more direct private investment. To come back to your question, if we have the private investment going up that is a stimulation for development and if we can integrate in those investments also environment requirements, there is also a change in the overall profile of the development. So what can be done in addition to that? I think for example the solution we had, the first step in the direction linked with the Kyoto protocol we developed in the framework of the climate change activities ...

LITTLEJOHNS: You mean the conference in Kyoto, Japan?

TÖPFER: There was a conference in Kyoto, Japan - December 1997 - and there was a question is it possible to join environment and development? And that was a clean development mechanism, clean environment, development is. So to link the two part, what is the background? You see, of course, we know that the industrialized countries they are really responsible for climate change because their emissions are the overwhelming magnitude of those emissions of CO₂, or carbon dioxide, for example. But on the other side, we have very high per capita emission in the industrialized countries but we have an increase in the developing countries. So it would be wonderful to say you need development to overcome poverty but please do it with the best available technologies, resource energies not having the highest output of CO₂. But the developed countries can only do this if they have the backing, the help of the industrialized countries. So you have the industrialized countries on the one side to pay for better technologies in the developing countries doing these also to help themselves because that is an overall stabilization or a decrease of the increase in developing countries. So that is mobilizing technology, that is mobilizing financial resources. Of course, hesitation by the developing countries. There are a lots of open question - how can we handle it? Is that not only the easy way out for the industrialized countries? Is there some loopholes to avoid to do something more at home? So that is what we have to discuss very, very honestly so that a new possibility, an additional possibility of finance must be available. And I underline additional that cannot substitute the official development aid, that cannot substitute the necessity to discuss debt in the developing countries, especially in the least developed countries we urgently need these as well.

LITTLEJOHNS: This is **World Chronicle**. Our guest is Under-Secretary-General Klaus Töpfer, Executive Director of UNEP. Judy?

LESSING: Mr. Töpfer, you talked about technology transfer and there is a problem with technology transfer, is there not? Because much of the technology which would be really helpful in developing countries has been developed by private individuals or private companies in the industrialized world and they are not really somewhat

reluctant to give things away, to give trade secrets away, simply to hand stuff over. Now how have you been able to get over that or have you not been able to?

TÖPFER: That is, of course, a very vital question. These are the property rights, intellectual property rights and that is the main concern also of our colleagues from the World Trade Organization. I don't believe that we have already solved those problems. The analysis is quite clear but we must do more especially also with regard to the very important problem of the bio-diversity convention. The question of bio-safety, the question of how to handle the breeders' rights. Those responsible for bio-diversity in their countries, giving the chance for others in the industrialized countries to develop products and technologies. So I cannot answer, really in a situation. Yes, we did it, we know the problem, we want to handle it better so that the developing countries can be also available. Additional sentence, I am a little bit afraid that there can be quite a lot of technologies in the developed countries which are not the best for transfer because they are the answer to the bottlenecks in the industrialized countries and in the industrialized countries the bottleneck was always labour. So the technologies were labour saving but energy intensive, capital intensive, resource intensive, water intensive and if you see the bottleneck in the world, the bottleneck in the world for the future is water. The bottleneck is energy, especially CO₂-free energy. So these are the necessities. We must make those bottlenecks really a matter of concern for those companies. I learned as a market economist that technology progress is never coming like manna from heaven. It is always going in the direction to overcome bottlenecks. In the developed countries for example water was not a bottleneck at all. We never have water saving technologies but they are urgently needed knowing that water will be in the centre of conflicts in the world in the near future. Maybe it is already now in some regions in the centre of conflicts. So both is necessary to transfer environmental friendly technologies. Please let us solve as the topic of intellectual property rights and on the other side, please develop those technologies, giving the right answers to the bottleneck in the world in the future.

FREEMAN: Speaking of conflicts, some of the cities in the world are becoming little zones of violence and conflict. The cities were the subject of the most recent Habitat

Conference and those of us who watched your work were happy to see when they gave you the job of the Environment Division, they also gave you the Habitat Division as well. What is happening in that area in terms of pacifying cities?

LITTLEJOHNS: In terms of what?

FREEMAN: Pacifying cities.

LITTLEJOHNS: Pacifying cities.

TÖPFER: I think it is – that is right expression indeed. You see we have in this year the World Habitat Day that is always the first Monday in October the motto: Safer Cities. And if you see the crimes of violence, the increase of insecurity in big cities, then you see that this is de-minding the society, that is a segmentation process and this is, by the way, also a result of poverty, of unemployment, especially of the young people, having no expectation of their future, having no shelter, having not the right neighbourhood, the families not with the capacity of integrating. So if we want to discuss the peace policy in the future this will be in the centre of peace policy. And we must have really a new approach – how to handle big innovations. Earlier in the 70's the United Nations once decided, "let's have a green revolution, to overcome the expected bottlenecks in food production". And this green revolution was very successful, by the way. What we need in the future is something like an earth revolution. How can we make new instruments available of city planning, of shelter, of better integration of the social differences? And, by the way, we have to do our utmost to avoid that safety, that security is being step by step a private good where you have to pay for. Security and safety must be a public good, a social good, an infra structural good available for everybody because otherwise you are again segmentating the society linked to this ability to pay. And there's a lot of good reason to have markets but in this specific topic, I really believe we need this as the responsibility of the government of the cities. Therefore let us stabilize our local authorities. They must be really the responsible partners. Altogether I am very concerned that this urbanization process going on right now will confront us with a lot of open question and hopefully Habitat, the City Agency of United Nation is able to solve those problems.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Töpfer, in your country, Germany, the Green Party for the first time is sharing responsibility in the government with the Social Democrat – so called red/green government you now have. What effect do you think this may have on German policy vis a vis the environment?

TÖPFER: First of all, I sincerely believe that it proves that the democratic development and situation in my country is quite stable. That is wonderful proof that after, as I believe, a very successful period of time under the able leadership of Helmut Kohl now we have the chance also for the former opposition to prove what is their approach, what is the lesson they want to learn us. To your question I'm sure that for example signals for another taxation structure will be working in this country. The question can we decrease the taxation on labour and increase the taxation of energy, of other resources, hopefully not only to have money, but hopefully also to decrease the consumption of energy, to decrease also the emission of CO₂ and others. I am also quite convinced that other possibilities, for example, the integration of the Non-Governmental Organizations will be even more intensively in the future and, of course, a little bit egoistic as well, I hope that the backing of the government to the international, the global organization will be very, very tough and also very progressive so that we can also rely on their backing.

LESSING: Can we go back to cities for a moment because it was quite clear long before the Habitat Conference in Istanbul in 1996 that more and more people were coming from rural areas partly because of poverty into cities where they face a different kind of poverty but one equally as awful I would suggest. But also in Istanbul one of the interesting things you had was an exhibition on best practices – good ideas from around the world. Are you continuing to share best practices?

TÖPFER: Yes. Without any doubt one of the most important thing we have to do. Year by year, we have some award for best practices. I was glad in this year that we had the chance to be in Dubai and there is a Dubai Award with also a very substantial sum of money. So to back those initiatives we have in this year ten of those outstanding examples from around the world. It's the best possibility to learn and to develop their own, the best solution for the problems at home. I also believe that we must make those

experience better known to others. We are in the situation of information, of communication technologies. We must make much more use of these to concentrate and to integrate – to disseminate – those knowledge and I think that the point started by my predecessor and colleague in Istanbul in this field is on a good track.

FREEMAN: To go back to the environment – we're getting some very bad news now – these horrible storms and floods that are attributed to global warming. The ozone hole over Antarctica is as big as it has ever been. Is there any good news on the environment for you to share with us?

TÖPFER: Of course, there are good news as well and ironically enough link with one or the other negative example. It's true that we have in this year a ozone hole bigger than ever but on the other side we know that the consumption of CFCs, of those chemicals being responsible for this, is going down dramatically linked with the global convention. When they started the global convention to protect the ozone layer we had only in the developed countries the production of these CFCs, chemicals of more than ...

LITTLEJOHNS: These are chemicals used in refrigeration?

TÖPFER: For example in aerosols, in foams and others. Very, very known and very intensive use so it was a production for over more than one million tons. Right now, we have less than 30 thousand tons production only for what we call the essential uses. There are some important uses where you cannot substitute it. Now we are going also with regard to the decrease of those productions in developing countries knowing that these must be also backed by financial possibility so we have the so-called Montreal Fund - more than seven hundred and sixty million dollars already now spent in developing countries to give them the chance to pay for the additional costs of the new technology. So we have the ozone hole. Nature reacts with quite a lot of time lags but in the real reason, we have already the decrease. So there are also very positive signals but nevertheless I cannot come and say, be sure every thing is okay. No, again and again please start at home. Try whatever is possible to avoid waste. To avoid excessive use of water and sewage water. Go and protect the nature. You, all, listening and being with us on the television, you all can be helpful. Don't ask only for the government to act. Don't

ask only for the local communities to act. They have to do their share as well, but if we all are joining our efforts, I think, then it is very good.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr Töpfer, on that note, that's all the time we have. Thank you for being with us on this edition of **World Chronicle**. Our guest has been Under-Secretary-General Klaus Töpfer. *Executive Director of UNEP. He was interviewed by Judy Lessing of Radio New Zealand and Jack Freeman of The Earth Times.* I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us on the next edition of **World Chronicle**.